

# E-ZINES AND E-TEXTBOOKS: APPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

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Ten years ago you didn't use email. Five, four, even three years ago, you probably didn't have an email account. Sending information worldwide through little wires seemed just too much a thing of the future.

Now the future has come to us so quickly, and so comfortably, that we've scarcely noticed how futuristic it was. Our teaching--like it or not—is inextricably tied to the e-world.

In this article I'll talk about how electronic textbooks e-zines can help your teaching right now, and what the implications are for the future. By way of example, I'll introduce my own e-textbook, "English Teachers in Russia," and subtly but unabashedly promote it.

## **What are e-zines?**

With the advent of email, enterprising self-publishers, or folks who simply wanted to gab about their hobbies, were quick to exploit the mass potential of the medium—even before big business. They put address lists together and sent out bulk mailings to their friends on whatever subjects they found interesting. Although not many people had email accounts, the cost of such publications was next to nothing. Nowadays, millions of people have access to email — and the cost is still next to nothing.

That's what an e-zine is, a magazine sent out regularly by email.

Many websites also call themselves magazines, or have a magazine as part of the site. That means they change their content, providing readers with new "issues" at regular intervals. Every major "brick-and-mortar" publication, from [Men's Health](#) to [Pravda](#), offers an online edition. But these websites differ from traditional magazines in that you have to visit them online. An e-zine, on the other hand, is sent to you, the subscriber, in your electronic mailbox.

For ESL instructors, as you know, there's an enormous amount of free material currently available online. But visiting websites often takes time: clicking, downloading, and waiting, and getting disconnected.

Subscribing to an e-zine can get you the material quicker. Just put your address on a mailing list, and—poof!—there’s the stuff in your mailbox. How do you find these e-zines? A quick search on Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) or any other search engine should do the trick. Type in “ESL subscribe materials,” “ESL e-zine,” “ESL free materials,” or any of several combinations (be creative) and you’ll find what you want. All subscriptions should be free. If they aren’t, just ignore them.

If you’re an ESP instructor looking for authentic materials, then you’re really in luck. There are hundreds, even thousands, of e-zines that will send you profession-specific material every day, or every week, or every month. These e-zines are for native speakers of English, which means that you can count on natural and authentic ESP material. A five-minute search that I undertook on Google revealed tons of e-zines on business, medicine, law, and science, and vocabulary building. Once again, just go to a search engine and type in the basic information you’re interested in receiving.

### **“English Teachers in Russia” Electronic Textbook**

This is my own bi-weekly publication, and it’s an e-textbook. It differs from ESL e-zines in that it doesn’t publish articles. It is a kind of endless textbook, providing teachers of and learners of ESL with new activities, texts, and vocabulary, every two weeks.

Unlike the traditional textbook, the kind that you can hold in your hands, “ETs in Russia” doesn’t have an overall framework, so it can’t be used as a syllabus; and it doesn’t have glossy pages or photographs. However, “ETs in Russia” — and other e-textbooks — have some major advantages. It is

**Free.** No charge. Gratis. Nothing to pay. Zilch.

**Regular.** New material appears every two weeks.

**Totally original.** That is, none of the material is stolen or plagiarized, and teaches may copy any part with impunity.

**Simple and practical.** There’s nothing glitzy about the e-zine. No photographs. But because the layout is plain, it can be read by computers everywhere, and takes up very little memory space. You just click on your mail, and there’s the new installment of your textbook. You can browse through for a few seconds and if there’s nothing that interests you, just delete it.

**Contemporary.** Up-to-date. Because “ETs in Russia” appears every two weeks, teachers and learners receive a continual and regular supply of supplemental material. The focus is on “used language.” Words and phrases that are very common in spoken language, but poorly represented in textbooks.

**Personable.** By that I mean, it is meant to be fun, and to engage students on a personal level.

**Targeted.** The activities are primarily targeted for teachers in Russia. But no Russian language is used. Among the subscribers are teachers from over fifteen countries and four continents. (Someone from Africa and Australia, please sign up!).

Those interested in subscribing to or in receiving back issues of “English Teachers in Russia” can write to [poosheesty@yahoo.com](mailto:poosheesty@yahoo.com) or [kevinm@samaramail.ru](mailto:kevinm@samaramail.ru)

**What will the future be for e-textbooks?**

Steven King has shown us, with his successful Internet novel Riding the Bullet, that cyber-books are here to stay.

Interestingly enough, the area of the publishing industry keenest on the idea is the textbook publishing industry. Why textbooks?

Publishers are lured by the idea of bigger profits: no printing, or binding, or shipping of heavy textbooks. They won't have to print new editions every 3 or 4 years.

Currency is what teachers are big on. They can update their textbooks or course syllabus at any time. And student learning will be more interactive, with sound and video. In the foreign language-learning arena, e-textbooks will talk to students, and students will talk back.

Students like the idea of not having to carry around a bag full of heavy books that will probably be of no use to them when the term is over.

This is not futuristic.

A study by Versaware found that 87% of American students polled thought e-textbooks were potentially more interesting than standard texts. Versaware noted that 45% spend more than 11 hours on line per week.

Several colleges already envision a campus with no books, where students carry a notebook computer in their backpacks. In fact, the University of Phoenix is already trying to convert to an electronic campus. It has 89,000 students and hopes to have 80% of its classes soon using e-textbooks exclusively.

Downloadable course material may soon be more convenient and more economic than traditional print textbooks. Consider China and Russia, the biggest ESL markets in the world. Teaching materials are limited outside of cities, as indeed are computers and Internet connections, but what is more realistic in the future--the installation of computers in the tens and thousands, or textbooks distributed in the millions?

Most teachers, and I'm not an exception, love the feel and smell of a new book, holding it in your hands, flipping through the pages. There will always be a place for real, seeable, touchable books, so don't worry.

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